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Report of the regional implementation meeting for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region*

Summary

The Arab regional implementation meeting for the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 29 and 30 May 2013 and brought together representatives from Arab Governments, regional and international organizations, major groups and technical experts from across the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The meeting offered a platform for deliberating and consensus-building on the follow-up to the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development; identifying and discussing priorities for the implementation of those outcomes in the Arab region; and providing collective input into the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and such key international processes and forums as the high-level political forum for sustainable development and the process for the development of sustainable development goals. Discussions focused, in particular, on the implications of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development for the region, the sustainable development goals, the green economy, the high-level political forum and regional and national institutions for sustainable development, as well as regional and national sustainable development initiatives.

The meeting adopted a set of recommendations in the form of the Dubai document for the Arab regional implementation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which will be presented to the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and forwarded to the League of Arab States to distribute to the Permanent Representatives of Arab countries to the United Nations in New York to guide negotiators from Arab countries in meetings relating to the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the high-level political forum and the Open Working Group on sustainable development goals.

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I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Arab regional implementation meeting, held on 29 and 30 May 2013 in Dubai, in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the League of Arab States (LAS), and in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Environment and Water and the Zayed International Foundation for the Environment in the United Arab Emirates. A half-day meeting of major groups was also held on 28 May 2013 prior to the official regional implementation meeting.

2. The meeting was organized in the context of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which was held in June 2012, and as part of ESCWA's mandate to lead regional implementation meetings for the Commission on Sustainable Development. The meeting engaged Arab Government delegates from the economic, social and environmental spheres as well as representatives from major groups and regional and international organizations.

3. The objective of the meeting was to provide a platform for:

(a) Deliberating on the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and their implications for the sustainable development agenda in the Arab region;

(b) Identifying and discussing priorities for implementation as per the priorities and needs of Arab countries and the region;

(c) Preparing an outcome document to serve as the region's collective input into the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum and other global processes relating to sustainable development.

4. The present report will be submitted to the twentieth session, which includes representatives from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, later in 2013, as the contribution of the Arab region to global follow-up to the Conference and to help inform ongoing processes, including the high-level political forum and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are members of this Group.)

5. The meeting consisted of an opening and closing session as well as five technical or substantive sessions addressing key outcomes of the Conference and regional and national implementation priorities for sustainable development.

6. The closing session resulted in the adoption of a set of recommendations known as the Dubai document for the Arab regional implementation of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which will be presented to the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and forwarded to the League of Arab States to distribute to the Permanent Representatives of Arab countries to the United Nations in New York to guide negotiators from Arab countries in meetings relating to the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the high-level political forum and the sustainable development goals (see E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/, sect. II).

7. A joint position statement on the Arab regional implementation meeting was also finalized by major groups, stakeholders and civil society (see ibid., annex B).

II. Conclusions and recommendations

8. A selection of the recommendations contained in the Dubai document and as relating to the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and regional implementation priorities is set out in Box 1 below.

Box 1

A selection of recommendations from the Dubai document for the Arab regional implementation of Rio+20

We recommend to the responsible authorities in the Arab countries the following:

(a) Work to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region in accordance with the region's circumstances and priorities through: updating the Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region and its operational plans in accordance with the priorities of the region, and work to implement Arab strategies and approved plans to meet the future challenges of sustainable development, including the Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region, the Arab Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 10-Year Strategic Plan and Framework to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the green belts project in the territories of the Arab world, regional biodiversity planning, the Muscat Action Plan for Wetlands in the Arab Countries, and the Arab Framework of Action on Climate Change;

(b) Undertake an assessment and prepare a report on the progress made in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region;

(c) Emphasize that sustainable development programmes in the Arab region target diversification of the economies of the Arab States and options to ensure poverty reduction and job creation, social justice, and environmental safety, including strengthening the capacity of sustainable productive sectors, especially in rural areas and small and medium enterprises, including encouraging youth groups in Arab societies;

(d) Diversify energy sources, including new and renewable energy to achieve sustainable development in the Arab region. To ensure this, developed countries and international organizations should provide support in the areas of scientific research, transfer and diffusion of technology, and capacity-building in relevant areas;

(e) Give priority to programmes that target poor and marginalized groups and work to provide more basic services and infrastructure, including water supply and sanitation, health and education, taking into account the equitable distribution of resources and services, especially in light of unprecedented population growth in recent times, with due consideration given to the needs of the major groups of farmers, academics, women, children and young people, among others;

(f) Introduce the concepts of sustainable development in the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities to raise the awareness of younger generations of the importance of achieving sustainable development, particularly the conservation and sustainability of natural resources;

(g) Support the existing trend in the Arab world for the development and establishment of information networks and data to support sustainable development decision-making processes and support and take advantage of Arab initiatives in this area that benefit decision-making, including the Abu Dhabi Environmental Data Initiative "Eye on Earth";

(h) Request that ESCWA prepare a periodic follow-up report on the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Arab countries for submission to the League of Arab States for adoption;

(i) Assign the League of Arab States to send this document to the Permanent Representatives of the Arab countries in New York and direct it to the negotiators from Arab countries to guide them in meetings related to preparations for the twentieth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and the consultative meetings to prepare the sustainable development goals;

(j) Present this document at the next meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.

III. Summary of discussions

9. The provisional agenda for the meeting is included in annex A to document E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/. The meeting comprised the following sessions:

- Opening Ceremony: Welcome and opening statements.
- Session 1: Overview of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and implications for the Arab region.
- Session 2: Sustainable development goals and post-2015.
- Session 3: A green economy road map for the Arab region.
- Session 4: Institutional framework for sustainable development: global, regional and national interlinkages.
- Session 5: Arab regional and national initiatives for sustainable development.
- Closing session: Discussion of the outcome document and report on the meeting.

10. A summary of discussions from each session follows.

11. The official meeting was preceded by a half-day meeting of major groups on 28 May 2013. (See the joint statement by major groups contained in E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013.)

A. Opening session

12. The opening ceremony of the meeting included statements by high-level representatives of organizing partner organizations and the host country.

13. The session opened with a statement by Rashid Ahmed Bin Fahad, Minister of Environment and Water, United Arab Emirates, who welcomed participants and highlighted that a key aim of the meeting was to operationalize the commitments from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in the Arab region. He also outlined the United Arab Emirates' pioneering role in the region in green growth and renewable energy.

14. Djamel Eddine Djaballah, Director of Environment, Housing, Water Resources and Sustainable Development at the League of Arab States then outlined the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, which provides the regional framework for sustainable development in the region, and noted that the Initiative is being updated to address the outcomes of the Conference and emerging issues and regional priorities.

15. Iyad Abumoghli, Director and Regional Representative, UNEP Regional Office for West Asia, presented sustainable development as both a responsibility and an opportunity for the region and highlighted the importance of having an Arab regional perspective in international negotiations and processes relating to sustainable development, including the process for developing the sustainable development goals.

16. Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division, ESCWA, discussed the importance of reviewing regional institutions for sustainable development in the Arab region, stressing the importance of scientific cooperation, research and technology and underlining key priorities for the region relating to water, food and energy security.

17. Lastly, Mohamed Ahmed Bin Fahad, Chairman of the Higher Committee of the Zayed International Foundation for the Environment and Director of the Dubai Policy Academy, welcomed the opportunity to develop a road map for the Arab region and highlighted the importance of local and national efforts to address regional priority challenges relating to food, energy and water security.

B. Session 1: overview of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and implications for the Arab region

18. Session 1 provided an overview of the meeting objectives and desired outcomes and explored the main outcomes of the Conference and their implications for the Arab region. It also provided the context for subsequent sessions, which focused specifically on sustainable development goals, the green economy, the

institutional framework for sustainable development and regional/national implementation. The session comprised two expert presentations, a keynote video address by Amina Mohammed, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, and a panel and open floor discussion. The session was moderated by Saad Al-Numairy, Adviser to the Minister of Environment and Water, United Arab Emirates.

19. Roula Majdalani, ESCWA, presented an overview of the meeting agenda, objectives and desired outcomes and posed a series of key questions to guide discussions during the meeting. She highlighted the global, regional and national interlinkages for sustainable development and the importance of developing a regional road map for implementing the outcomes of the Conference that would address regional priorities and national challenges. She also underlined the need to update the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region to include tangible activities relating to capacity-building, technology, finance and institutional reform and highlighted the importance of sharing experiences among Arab countries and building upon and scaling up national success stories in the Arab region. She also emphasized that the region faces a range of interlinking environmental, social and economic challenges and that the Conference had provided some new tools to assist Governments to address those challenges in an integrated way, including the sustainable development goals, green economy and enhanced institutions.

20. The video message from Amina Mohammed provided insights into the processes under way in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, highlighting the need to build on the Millennium Development Goals through an inclusive process with sustainable development as the ultimate goal. The global agenda needs to be universal, transformative, people-centred and planet-sensitive. Key challenges in this regard include the rapid rise in energy consumption owing to subsidies, increasing consumption of water and decreasing supply, and lifestyle changes leading to overconsumption. National and regional consultations undertaken in the context of the post-2015 agenda highlighted priorities for the region, including good governance, social justice and human dignity. She closed with a request that the Arab region make its voice heard loud and clear in global discussions.

21. Anhar Hegazi, ESCWA consultant, presented an overview of the outcomes of the Conference and the implications for the Arab region, highlighting that any regional road map for sustainable development will need to address regional priorities, including energy security, water security, food security, youth unemployment, peace and security, sustainable urban development and sustainable consumption and production. She stated that Arab regional priorities agreed upon in the Arab Ministerial Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development had generally been taken into consideration and addressed in the outcome document of the Conference. Green economy should be a mechanism for sustainable development, not a barrier, and Arab countries should consider how they can create effective legislative and supportive environments that can accelerate progress towards sustainable development and green economy. The importance of financing mechanisms and technology transfer was also highlighted.

22. Four panellists further informed discussions by providing insights based on their experience. Mr. Abusafieh, Minister of Environment, State of Palestine touched upon some key areas that need to be addressed to move the sustainable

development agenda forward, including the role of education and awareness, the importance of broadening the scope of sustainable development from environmental management to encompass the three pillars, and the need to address unsustainable consumption and rejuvenate the Arab Environment Facility. Rashid Al-Kuwari, Assistant Under-Secretary for Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Qatar outlined key regional conventions relating to sustainable development and emphasized the importance of enhancing the engagement of the Arab region in all international forums with a united Arab regional road map and position. Djamel Djaballah, LAS, outlined regional specificities relating to war, conflict, terrorism and the exploitation of financial and natural resources and underlined the need to develop a long-term sustainable development road map for the region in line with regional capacities and building upon progress made over the past 10 years as well as the need to develop intraregional transfer of knowledge and innovation. Jihad Azour, former Minister of Finance, Lebanon indicated that the region still views sustainable development as a challenge rather than an opportunity for advancing a regional agenda. He underlined the need for growth and employment generation in the region and emphasized that countries should undertake scoping studies on investment opportunities for green economy in key sectors to present to Arab investors. He also highlighted the need to reconsider financing mechanisms for sustainable development.

23. The panellists' statements were followed by a moderated discussion with interventions by representatives of Arab Governments (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen and the State of Palestine) and major groups (science and technology, non-governmental organizations) that highlighted a range of issues.

24. Several countries referenced the need for the developed countries to realize their international commitments, including those relating to technology, finance, trade and debt relief. Others highlighted the need for a clear vision and road map for sustainable development in the region that moves from the old approach of viewing developing countries as recipients of knowledge and resources to one that builds human capacity and development as the basis for innovation, opening markets and attracting investment. The need to have a joint Arab position on key international processes was stressed, including on the high-level political forum, the sustainable development goals and financing for sustainable development. With regard to regional priorities, peace and security, foreign occupation, food security, water scarcity, energy security, employment generation, desertification, climate change and the refugee situation were all highlighted. The importance of building capacity for integrated decision-making was underlined, including updating statistical data and systems and effective measurement of sustainable development objectives. The emerging importance of green economy as a tool for sustainable development was also highlighted; however, concerns were expressed with regard to its definition and how it can best be applied. Other mechanisms for sustainable development in the region that were stressed include the need to update the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region and strengthening the institutional framework so that it addresses all three dimensions of sustainable development in a coordinated and cohesive manner. The importance of broad participation by relevant stakeholders was also highlighted.

25. Representatives of major groups underlined the need for a paradigm shift to embrace green economy as a tool for sustainable development and the need for

policies that encourage scientific research and educational reform to embrace sustainable development. They also stressed the need to address inequalities at different levels and to ensure accountability and engagement of civil society in policymaking and in developing a road map for the region.

C. Session 2: sustainable development goals and post-2015

26. The session discussed the sustainable development goals and post-2015 agenda with a view to identifying key Arab regional messages to be communicated to relevant international processes and forums as well as key regional priorities for implementing the sustainable development goals at the regional and national levels. The session comprised two expert presentations, a panel discussion and a plenary discussion and was moderated by Sameer Ghazi, Presidential Deputy for Environment and Sustainable Development, Saudi Arabia.

27. Michelle Obeid, University of Manchester, presented the key findings from a background paper, "Key Issues for Consideration on the Sustainable Development Goals and Post-2015 Agenda", highlighting the uneven progress on the Millennium Development Goals and, in respect of the sustainable development goals, the need to build on experience to date. She highlighted key conceptual challenges relating to how best to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development into a cohesive agenda to reach a coherent, universal platform for post-2015. The need for broad stakeholder engagement was also mentioned and a number of regional priorities for the sustainable development goals were highlighted, including peace and security, climate change, energy, food and water security, decent jobs, migration, urbanization and gender equality.

28. Waleed Zubari, Arabian Gulf University, highlighted some shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals, stating that they were formulated by donors, do not acknowledge the realities facing countries and address quantity instead of quality. He emphasized that the food-energy-water nexus should be a priority for the formulation of the sustainable development goals, along with due consideration of quality and adequate indicators. He stressed the importance of understanding the interlinkages and trade-offs between policy objectives and the need for comprehensive plans for water and energy security.

29. Two expert panellists subsequently contributed to the discussions. Ghassan Al Sayah, Senior Adviser to the Minister of Environment, Lebanon, highlighted several obstacles to sustainable development, including the need for political and economic stability, poverty eradication, access to clean water, the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the severe strain that the escalating numbers of refugees are placing on development. Kishan Khoday, Practice Leader for Energy and Environment in the Arab States, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), highlighted the need for equitable access to energy, water and food and the need to support vulnerable communities where climate change is compounding existing problems, the importance of effective governance for sustainable development in the region, the rising importance of green economy and South-South cooperation in the post-Millennium Development Goal framework, and the need to look at the role of Arab investments in Asia and Africa with consequences for food and energy security.

30. A moderated plenary discussion ensued with interventions by Arab countries, major groups and regional organizations. In their interventions, Arab countries highlighted a range of regional priority issues to be addressed by the sustainable development goals, including peace and security, poverty eradication, freedom from violence, the implementation of a green economy road map, health-care services, migration, foreign occupation, good governance, access to water and the energy-food-water nexus, climate change, desertification, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity preservation. Other issues raised in the context of the sustainable development goals included the importance of the Rio Principles, especially the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the need for official development assistance (ODA) for developing countries, the acknowledgement that different countries have different national priorities and circumstances, addressing differences between developed and developing countries, considering the needs of future generations, and the importance of inclusive consultations on the post-2015 agenda at the country level.

31. Regional United Nations and LAS organizations highlighted the important role of regional institutions such as the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and LAS in coordinating a unified position on the sustainable development goals, as well as the importance of embracing the three dimensions of sustainable development.

32. Representatives from major groups highlighted the need for inclusive consultations on the sustainable development goals that engage major groups and the importance of science-based goals and evidence-based decision-making, education, health care and the prevention of violence against vulnerable groups.

33. Some of the key messages drawn from the discussions were that Arab countries need to contribute to the development of the sustainable development goals, taking into account specific challenges in the Arab region such as demographic changes, lack of stability and governance, economic and food crises, and the exploitation of natural resources. The importance of a universal agenda for both developed and developing countries was also acknowledged. Lastly, the goals should be limited in number and address all three dimensions of sustainable development.

D. Session 3: a green economy road map for the Arab region

34. Participants discussed opportunities and priorities for the transition towards a green economy in the Arab region and analysis undertaken to date, and identified how the Arab region might operationalize the transition towards a green economy at the regional and national levels. The session comprised two expert presentations, a panel discussion and a plenary discussion and was moderated by Iyad Abumoghli, UNEP.

35. Introducing the session, the moderator pointed to the need to look at all sectors, not only energy, and called for a "knowledge-sharing institution" or platform for the green economy for the region. He also mentioned the work that UNEP is doing with partners at the global level through its Partnership for Action on Green Economy.

36. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Productive Sectors Section, ESCWA stated that green economy had been adopted at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development as an important tool for sustainable development but that there is no one size fits all. Some countries in the Arab region now have national initiatives on green economy or green growth; it is necessary to look at how those initiatives can be built upon or scaled up. ESCWA has undertaken preparatory work on mapping green economy policies, institutions, programmes and preliminary indicators to monitor progress in the Arab region, developing policy guidelines for decision makers and conducting a pilot project to set up green helpdesks in Oman and Lebanon and, soon, in Jordan. Further regional cooperation is needed to move towards green economy in the region.

37. Mohammed Abdrabo, University of Alexandria, presented preliminary results from an ongoing green economy study for the Arab region that is investigating policy options for driving investment in the green economy across the key sectors of water, food and energy. The study is being coordinated by ESCWA and UNEP in response to a request by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment. The study will focus on the four key subregions of the Gulf Cooperation Council, least developed countries, the Maghreb and the Mashreq and use a multi-criteria analysis to identify potential policy priorities for different groups.

38. Two expert panellists then provided their insights into the discussion. Hussein Abaza, Adviser to the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Egypt outlined a main message that foreign support will come to the region only when it has a long-term vision. The debate should not focus on what is green economy, but rather on how to implement green economy in the region. He presented the rationale for approaching the problem from an economic perspective, as traditional environmental approaches have not worked well. He emphasized the need to have coherent policies at all levels in order to address trade-offs, and the role of civil society participation and of education and environmental awareness. Also mentioned were the need for the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization to change their ways of dealing with developing countries, including addressing the issue of conditionalities and trade distortions caused by developed countries. He mentioned the need for a centre of excellence on green economy in the region, focused on the exchange of best practices.

39. Khaled Irani, former Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Jordan made a case for the adoption of the green economy based on the Jordanian example. He emphasized that Governments should engage the private sector in sectors such as waste management and pointed to the need for adequate regulation in renewable energy sectors and to the fact that subsidies can be too high. He explained how Jordan has introduced ecotourism, which has generated income streams for local communities in remote areas.

40. The open plenary discussion reflected different viewpoints from Arab countries on the green economy and the way forward. Some countries such as Jordan, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates have well-advanced plans or road maps. The United Arab Emirates road map will be finalized in September 2013 and focuses on the reduction of gas flaring, water use efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. Jordan has identified six target areas for its green economy work that have the potential to create 51,000 new job opportunities: energy access, renewable

energy, waste, agriculture, sustainable tourism and freshwater management. Morocco's priorities for green growth include increasing the production of renewable energy, recycling plastic materials, renewable energy plans, the management of renewable water resources, restructuring the agricultural system, and reforming environmental taxes.

41. Other countries expressed concern that there is still no definition of green economy and that countries need to focus on their own priorities. Kuwait called for a regional meeting to discuss the definition of the green economy in the regional context, while Saudi Arabia questioned the methodology of the green economy study being coordinated by ESCWA and UNEP, in particular whether it addresses important aspects such as trade and information on costs for the region. Some countries highlighted that the green economy approach is intrinsically environmental in nature and is unlikely to produce job opportunities and address regional development challenges, well-being and equality.

42. Major groups underlined the relevance of green economy as a tool for the region, provided that it is adapted to reflect regional and national priorities, and also highlighted the importance of new indicators for measuring progress that go beyond the gross domestic product (GDP). The importance of empowering small farmers and women was also highlighted, including through the introduction of enabling legislation and incentives to help them to shift towards the green economy.

E. Session 4: institutional framework for sustainable development: global, regional and national interlinkages

43. The session provided an overview of the emerging global institutional framework for sustainable development and the global, regional and national interlinkages and explored opportunities for enhancing Arab regional and national institutions for sustainable development so that they better engage with international processes and better facilitate the implementation of sustainable development and integrated decision-making at the regional and national levels. The session comprised three expert presentations, a panel discussion and a plenary discussion and was moderated by Zahwa Kuwari, Director, Environmental Assessment and Planning Directorate, Bahrain.

44. Irena Zubcevic and David Le Blanc, Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, provided an overview of the emerging international framework for sustainable development, including the high-level political forum, the sustainable development goals, financing for sustainable development and the technology mechanism processes, and highlighted the issue of linking those processes together. They outlined some of the lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development at the global, regional and national levels, including the need for an effective regional platform and enhancing regional engagement, as well as the importance of interregional dialogue. The high-level political forum could provide a better platform for sharing national experiences through voluntary peer review, presentations, a database for sharing practices and lessons learned, and capacity-building for preparations at the national level. Sustainable development should be strengthened as the overarching framework for the work of regional commissions, including fostering the mainstreaming of sustainable development at the national level and engaging all

relevant State and non-State actors. The high-level political forum should engage regional commissions more systematically in its sessions and support interregional dialogues.

45. Melanie Hutchinson, Programme Officer, UNEP provided an overview of the processes to date stemming from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and relating to environmental governance, including the strengthening and upgrading of UNEP. She outlined the importance of strengthening the science-policy interface as well as the regional presence of UNEP and capacity-building and stated that the first universal session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum of UNEP had been held in February 2013. She also highlighted UNEP's progress in establishing an International Advisory Council for the Advancement of Justice, Governance and Law for Environmental Sustainability. She stated that environmental sustainability will need to be addressed in the sustainable development goals in a balanced manner. She concluded that democracy, good governance and the rule of law are essential for sustainable development, inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

46. Riccardo Mesiano, First Economic Affairs Officer, ESCWA presented the findings of a background paper on institutions for sustainable development. He highlighted the global, regional and national interlinkages within the new framework of the high-level political forum and stressed that the Arab region needs to remain engaged with the international processes stemming from the Conference, including the high-level political forum, the sustainable development goals process and the financing strategy. Some key issues for Governments to consider include how regional institutions can best support the follow-up to the Conference, how institutional arrangements can enhance integration of the three dimensions, and how green economy can best be applied by the region. One of the region's key gaps is that sustainable development has been allocated largely to environmental institutions, which has limited a fully integrated approach to decision-making. The Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region have provided important mechanisms at the regional level and significant progress has been made on environmental management and sustainable development; however, countries should consider reviewing regional institutional arrangements so that sustainable development is addressed at the highest political level and mechanisms are in place for cross-sectoral coordination, at both the regional and national levels. In the context of the high-level political forum, ESCWA, LAS and UNEP should continue to organize regional meetings and enhance the engagement of the Arab region in global processes. The integration of green economy policies into national strategies and the potential for a regional green economy road map were also highlighted, as was the need for a participatory approach to policy development.

47. Two expert panellists then provided their insights regarding institutions for sustainable development. Mona Makram-Ebeid, Senator, Egypt stated that sustainable development goals must inspire regional and local governments, civil society and individuals to change their behaviour and referred to the need for an integrated approach to decision-making that addresses the three dimensions of sustainable development. She highlighted the key role of parliaments in achieving sustainable development commitments and proposed a new perspective on sustainable development with the economy servicing social and environmental

objectives. Mehdi Jafaar, Oman Environment Society, Oman outlined the importance of reforming institutions in the context of the Conference as a means to an end and stated that institutions in the Arab region should be built upon good governance and transparency. He pointed out that a key gap in the region is the absence of effective engagement with non-governmental organizations and civil society and that the region is going in the opposite direction to the rest of the world in that regard. He also advocated a long-term vision for green economy in the region in accordance with national circumstances and emphasized that national strategies for sustainable development have suffered in the past from poor implementation since they are not effectively integrated in the institutional framework.

48. A moderated plenary discussion followed with interventions by Arab countries, major groups and regional organizations. Countries had differing views on the need for institutional reform. Saudi Arabia highlighted the success of regional institutions such as the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and the development of sustainable development indicators and said that the region is leading the world in national institutions for sustainable development. Several countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen, pointed out that key institutional gaps are the allocation of sustainable development to the environment pillar and a lack of effective institutional mechanisms for the integration of the three dimensions. Jordan emphasized that the institutional framework needs to be reformed to address new and emerging issues, including food, energy and financial crises. Tunisia and Iraq recognized the important role of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, but advocated for the establishment of a sustainable development council or a regional high-level political forum for sustainable development that can effectively integrate social, economic and environmental issues. The panellists, ESCWA and UNEP supported the proposal for a regional high-level political forum involving all key ministries, to capitalize on regional success stories in all key sectors.

49. Major groups made a number of key points: the need to capitalize on lessons learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development at the international level; the need to establish an optimal mechanism in LAS that includes all sectoral ministries, not just environment, with clear executive policy and follow-up mechanisms, including evaluation, monitoring, financing and skills development; and the importance of enhancing the role of non-governmental organizations in partnership with Governments.

F. Session 5: Arab regional and national initiatives for sustainable development

50. Participants discussed the experience in the region with the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region, including its successes, shortcomings and gaps and the best way forward for updating the Initiative so that it provides an enhanced mechanism for accelerating the implementation of sustainable development in the region. The session also showcased some leading national case studies on the implementation of sustainable development in the post-Conference context and discussed how they might be scaled up in the region. The session included four expert presentations and a panel and plenary discussion moderated by Mostafa Madbouly, Director, Regional Office for Arab States, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

51. The moderator opened the session by highlighting the need to develop means implementing the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region and a mechanism for coordinating ministries within the Arab region.

52. Ibrahim Abdel Gelil, Arabian Gulf University, presented a background paper that proposes a framework for updating the Initiative. He highlighted the need to review existing strategies, progress and gaps rather than developing new strategies. Key priorities proposed for inclusion in the Initiative include peace and security, the water-energy-food nexus, climate change and green economy. He outlined a range of existing strategies for issues such as water and climate change and the need to focus on identifying gaps and implementation. To operationalize the Initiative, it is necessary to develop an action plan that requires Governments to answer key questions including who, what, when and at what cost. He outlined the need for subregional plans, Arab-Arab cooperation and an Arab environment facility to address means of implementation.

53. Monia Braham, Director of Economic-Environmental Analysis and Planning, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Tunisia presented Tunisia's national road map for the follow-up to the Conference, which focuses on green growth based on principles of national sovereignty and global integration. Tunisia is working with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to adopt the green economy concept and with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on a national strategy for green jobs.

54. Capricia Chabarekh, Environmental Specialist, ECODIT Liban, outlined Lebanon's national report for the Conference and provided an overview of its efforts towards a national strategy for sustainable development. She also highlighted some of the challenges faced by Lebanon, including environmental damage caused by Israel and the growing number of refugees.

55. Two expert panellists then provided their insights into regional and national initiatives for sustainable development. Mohammed Maktit, Head of Planning and Forecasting Division, Ministry of Energy, Mining, Water and Environment, Morocco underlined the need for a participatory approach to sustainable development at the national level that addresses social, economic and environmental aspects in a balanced manner. Nuha Ma'aytah, President, General Federation of Jordanian Women highlighted the importance of a regional forum and regional initiative for sustainable development with short-, medium- and long-term horizons, specific timetables, indicators, improved governance and accountability. She also underlined the need for the participation of civil society and women in the implementation process.

56. The moderator highlighted some key questions for updating the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region, including the consideration of subregional differences, the role of national Governments and regional institutions, the provision of financial resources, indicators and monitoring of the Initiative, and clear time frames. He also underlined the critical issue of urban livelihoods, which should be addressed in an updated Initiative given that future development in the Arab region will focus on the expansion of cities. The region should set regional midterm targets for renewable energy, water and transport that are monitored with measurable indicators.

57. Jordan indicated that while the region has comprehensive strategies in place, the key gap is implementation. Similarly, many countries have national strategies in place but fail to implement them. The region has a responsibility to stimulate and secure investment and, to do so, must address peace and security issues. There have been major changes since 2002 when the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region was developed, including with regard to investment and foreign direct investment, and the updated Initiative will need to take stock of this new reality.

58. The Arab Organization for Agricultural Development highlighted three points: that Arab organizations should participate in the update of the Initiative; that a meeting should be organized to ensure consistency and synergies with existing strategies; and that Arab funds should open windows for funding sustainable development in the region.

59. The major groups supported the need to update the Initiative and the approach proposed by Ibrahim Abdel Gelil with the inclusion of urban development. The Arab Network for Environment and Development outlined the comprehensive approach taken in Egypt through a sustainable development forum comprising 14 working groups focusing on all key topics of sustainable development; it suggested that that could be used as a model to scale up to the regional level with a regional think tank including all relevant stakeholders.

60. A final presentation by Fatma Sahib Al Habashi, Ministry of Environment and Water, United Arab Emirates provided an overview of the country's national plan for green growth, which is being developed through a collaborative effort between the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Global Green Growth Institute. The green growth plan of the United Arab Emirates comprises four components: policy and governance, data management, capacity-building, and pilot projects. The strategy also targets six priority sectors: oil and gas, water and electricity, transport, construction, waste management and land use. Stakeholders with expertise within their sectors will work together to identify policies and initiatives under the guidance of the green growth plan team and sectoral strategies will be integrated and synergized to form a national strategic framework for policymaking. The strategy will include rigorous economic and policy analysis to develop priority actions and will contain policy recommendations, an implementation road map, key performance indicators to measure progress, and roles and responsibilities.

G. Closing session: discussion of the outcome document of the regional implementation meeting

61. The closing session of the Arab regional implementation meeting focused on a discussion of a short outcome document which had been circulated to participants in draft format prior to the session. The session was chaired by Fadhil Abbas Ahmed, Iraq (Chair of the 2013 session of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment) along with representatives from the organizing partners LAS, ESCWA and UNEP as well as the host country, the United Arab Emirates. The draft outcome document was presented as a non-binding document that will provide recommendations and guidance for negotiators from Arab countries in New York with regard to key sustainable development processes.

62. An open plenary discussion followed with amendments proposed to the outcome document by country delegates. The title of the document was amended, at the request of several countries, from the "Dubai declaration" to the "Dubai document". Countries briefly discussed the preambular paragraphs before agreeing to move on to the substantive paragraphs.

63. With respect to the high-level political forum for sustainable development, country delegates discussed the importance of ensuring that the forum is established with a strong institutional structure and in accordance with all the functions and powers agreed to at the Conference. Concerns were expressed that negotiations currently taking place in New York are aiming to weaken that institutional structure; the Arab region therefore needs to take a firm position on establishing a strong high-level political forum.

64. With regard to the sustainable development goals, delegates agreed to elevate the issue of peace and security as a priority for the region, along with food, energy, water, transportation, land degradation, desertification and other issues. The importance of water desalination and wastewater treatment was also highlighted. Delegates supported the development of concepts for applying green economy in accordance with national circumstances.

65. Country delegates also supported the effective partnership among ESCWA, UNEP and LAS with regard to sustainable development and coordinating post-Conference follow-up activities. Delegates supported the update of the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region and requested that a progress report be prepared and that ESCWA prepare a periodic follow-up report on the implementation of the outcomes of the Conference in Arab countries.

66. Regional organizations and major groups also provided comments. Major groups drew attention to their joint position statement and their key recommendations relating to the sustainable development goals, Arab regional and national initiatives for sustainable development, and the engagement of major groups in sustainable development policymaking.

67. At the close of the session, it was agreed that the Dubai document would be circulated for final comment and then finalized and submitted to LAS to send to the Permanent Representatives of Arab countries to the United Nations in New York to guide them in meetings and preparations for the twentieth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the high-level political forum and consultative meetings on the sustainable development goals. It was also agreed that the document would be submitted to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment.

68. The chairs closed the meeting by expressing gratitude to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for hosting the meeting and to the organizing partners and all participants for their contributions.

IV. Organization of work

A. Venue and date

69. The meeting was held at the Dubai Police Academy in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on 29 and 30 May 2013. The meeting was preceded by a half-day meeting of major groups on 28 May 2013.

B. Agenda

70. The provisional agenda for the Arab regional implementation meeting is included in annex A to document E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/.

C. Participants

71. The meeting was attended by a total of 149 participants, including representatives of the organizing partners and host country. A total of 77 participants represented 18 Governments of Arab countries, while representation by major groups and civil society was prominent, with 15 participants. It is noteworthy that Government representation covered a variety of ministries, including foreign affairs, environment, social affairs, planning, finance, economy, energy, trade and agriculture.

72. The full list of participants is included in annex C to document E/ESCWA/SDPD/2013/.

D. Evaluation

73. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the meeting. A total of 49 participants responded, 89 per cent of whom rated the overall quality of the meeting as good to excellent. A total of 92 per cent of respondents rated the quality of the meeting documentation as good to excellent, while 78 per cent rated the quality of the presentations as good to excellent. All of the respondents thought that the meeting provided a good to excellent opportunity for networking and experience-sharing among experts. A total of 77 per cent of respondents rated the clarity of the meeting objectives as good to excellent, while 70 per cent thought that the meeting was good to excellent at meeting its objectives. When asked about the need for follow-up to the results of the meeting, almost all respondents (98 per cent) were positive.

74. With regard to written comments, a general comment made by several participants was that additional time was needed to discuss key topics in more detail. In addition, a number highlighted the need for more opportunities for sharing country experiences and achievements on specific sustainable development topics. In that regard, the role of ESCWA in providing opportunities for exchanging experiences among Arab countries was highlighted. Another comment concerned the need to broaden the focus of the discussions on the environment by placing greater emphasis on economic and social dimensions.

75. With regard to follow-up work, there was an overwhelming response in support for follow-up activities, with numerous suggestions by participants primarily focusing on enhancing communication, networking, experience-sharing and consultation. Key proposals included:

(a) Create a network of sustainable development focal points based on the meeting participants and advise on follow-up to the meeting;

(b) Request ESCWA to prepare a regular bulletin to be dispatched to Arab experts and stakeholders updating them on progress made and on ongoing negotiations on issues relating to outcomes of the Conference, particularly the sustainable development goals, the high-level political forum and a sustainable development financing strategy;

(c) Share the Arab regional implementation meeting outcomes formally with relevant stakeholders in the international community;

(d) Organize a follow-up meeting to support continued country consultations on suitable financing mechanisms for sustainable development and the sustainable development goals;

(e) Organize small working groups and round tables to discuss key topics in depth, including a dedicated meeting to develop the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region and to share country experiences and success stories;

(f) Request ESCWA to develop, in collaboration with concerned parties, a specific methodology for indicators to measure progress in green economy.

E. Documents and presentations

76. The documentation and presentations from the Arab regional implementation meeting are available online from http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2044E.